

# **EMBASSY OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA**

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## **PROTECTING INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY RIGHTS: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES**

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**U.S. Ambassador to Bangladesh**

Why should Bangladesh care about protecting intellectual property rights?

Intellectual property rights (IPR) are the legal mechanisms – copyrights, patents and trademarks – that ensure that the products we buy are genuine. Dangerous and defective counterfeit products, from counterfeit medication, to toothpaste, to auto parts, put the lives of consumers at risk. A strong IPR system ensures that inventors and innovators are rewarded for their ideas. IPR protections foster an environment in which creative and innovative industries can thrive and contribute to economic development worldwide.

At the dawn of the 21st century, an increasing share of global economic output is generated by services, many of which depend on new and evolving technologies. Inventors, creators, and other risk-takers play a critical role in this economic progress, and the protection of IPR is necessary to ensure that the advances that result from their efforts are rewarded and valued. Progress in nanotechnology, information technology, and clean energy fosters economic development and improves standards of living worldwide.

Intellectual property rights don't just protect inventors or large corporations; they protect local entrepreneurs and artists. A clear example of innovation in Bangladesh is the pioneering work of Mustafa Jabbar, inventor of the Bijoy Bangla keyboard and related software. The recent court decision recognizing Mr. Jabbar's ownership of the technology he developed is an important step in encouraging innovation. Bangladesh's film-makers such as Catherine and Tareque Masud have won critical international acclaim for their films but frequently suffer the theft of their work in their home country.

The illegal sale of stolen music and films in nearly all of Bangladesh's markets is a troubling indicator of the scale of the IPR protection challenge.

Developing countries too often assume that IPR only benefits first world nations. This perspective unfairly discounts indigenous capacity for innovation – as if good ideas worth protecting and promoting can only come from the first world. Officials in less developed countries cite the World Trade Organization's TRIPS agreement as granting their countries exemption from international IPR standards until 2013 (and 2016 for pharmaceutical patents.) Relying upon these temporary "exemptions" is a choice fraught with risks. An economy built on weak IPR foundations is one in which the abuse of foreign and domestic IPR occurs hand-in-hand. Any country seeking free-trade agreements cannot ignore today's work to ensure meeting future obligations to protect IPR.

The human potential to create and innovate is a boundless worldwide resource. Clear rules and strong enforcement of IPR allows countries to sustain economic development and to build recognizable and respected brands worldwide. Bangladesh's innovators, inventors and artists have proven themselves worthy of the highest awards and recognition world wide – it's time that Bangladesh's domestic IPR mechanisms now grant them the same honor.

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**NOTE TO OP-ED EDITOR:** We request you to publish this op-ed in full.

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Note: A Bangla translation of this article is also available at the American Center. If you are interested in the translation, please call the American Center Press Section, Tel: 8837150-4, Fax: 9885688; e-mail: [DhakaPA@state.gov](mailto:DhakaPA@state.gov); Website: <http://dhaka.usembassy.gov>